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ABSTRACT

Psychological and verbal abuse of referees and umpires by athletes and spectators was examined in an effort to determine the basic attitudes that contribute to the phenomenon. This research focused on three questions. First, is there a similarity in how athletes and nonathletes feel about political authority and sport officials? Second, what is the relationship between feelings of trust and confidence in the sport official and disrespect actually shown to the sport official? Finally, what are the differences between groups of athletes and nonathletes in disrespectful behavior? An analysis of the results of the questionnaire submitted to college students is presented. A copy of the questionnaire is appended. (JD)

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The Relationship Between Support for Authority Support for Sport Officials, and Disrespectful Behavior in Sport.

By

Katherine H. Nelson

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For a number of years sport was considered hallowed ground, a place where we "molded the youth" and "built character". However, a few years back professionals began to open their eyes to see what was really going on. And we found there was violence, deceit and a good deal of abuse being given to our sport officials. With reference to the last phenomenon, Bill Surface has described referees and umpires as being under "almost unbelievable psychological and verbal punishment."[1]

There have been two explanations for the presence of disrespectful and violent behavior in sport. One approach suggests that sport encourages or fosters certain questionable behaviors through its subculture norms. In this model, each sport has allowed certain actions, such as yelling at the umpire or arguing with the referee, to become traditional conduct which is tolerated, and even expected. These behaviors are seen as part of the game, or to use a term coined by Loy, McPherson, and Kenyon, the behaviors become "traditions of deviance".[2]

A second explanation suggests that sport merely reflects values already present in the larger society. In this view, the current rebellion against our society's authorities and their actions is said to have filtered into the sport world. The mistrust and lack of confidence in political authorities has supposedly resulted in a lack of respect for authority in general. Applying this notion to the sport world, the actions of yelling or arguing with the sport official would result from a more pervasive disregard for all authority.

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If the first explanation is valid, then sport perpetuates disrespectful behavior through its traditions, and one would expect that each sport would have its own traditions, or patterns, for acceptable behavior. However, if the latter explanation is more appropriate, then disrespectful behavior should pervade all sports to some degree in relation to the feelings of the sport participants toward authority figures.

The purpose of this study was to examine these contrasting explanations concerning disrespect to sport officials. In particular, this research set out to do three things. First, to determine if there is a similarity in how both athletes and nonathletes feel about polical authority and sport officials. Second, to then examine the relationship between feelings of trust and confidence in the sport official and the disrespect actually shown to the sport official. And finally, to look at differences between groups of athletes and nonathletes in disrespectful behavior, in an effort to discover if there actually are subgroup patterns for what is acceptable.

In order to examine these issues, a questionnaire was given to 142 men and women athletes, and 117 men and women nonathletes. Athletes were college participants in basketball, gymnastics, swimming, and baseball or softball. Nonathletes were college students who had not participated in either college or high school athletics.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part gathered demographic information used for classification. Part two consisted of a 5 scale semantic differential as shown on the overhead, which measured the concept of support for three authority figures, "president", and "police officer" to represent political authority at opposite ends of political continuum, and "referee-umpire" to denote a sport authority. "Support" is a term taken from the political research of David Easton and was defined as "generalized trust

and confidence" in an authority figure.[3] The subjects expressed their feelings of support by marking each scale. Values were then assigned so that a higher score indicated more support. An official who is good, honest, fair, kind, and nice would be trusted and receive high levels of support.

The third part of the questionaire contained 12 disrespectful and 2 respectful behavior items with a 7 point Likert scale. Sample items are shown. Parallel items were written in the terminology for each sport so that individual sport norms would be indicated. The items you see were given to basketball players. Subjects expressed their approval or disapproval of each behavior. The total of all items determined the respectful behavior score with a higher score demonstrating more respectful behavior.

In order to determine if support for political authority was similar to support for the referee-umpire, mean support scores for each group were compluted as shown. It is apparent that all scores are only slightly positive, since a 4 is neutral, with 7 being very positive. This result is consistent with previous political research which shows only minimal confidence in authorities. An F test for two-way analysis of variance was computed to discover if apparent differences were significant. For further location of specific differences between groups and concepts, a one-way analysis of variance and a Scheffe test, were performed. This analysis showed that the only significant difference was found between how women nonathletes view the president and the police officer. No significant differences were found in any group between support for the sport official and support for either of the political authorities. Therefore, it was concluded that the level of support given the sport official is similar to that given political authority. This would appear to support the idea that respect for the sport official is related to respect for authority in the larger society.

In the next phase of analysis, a rank order correlation was computed between "support for the sport official", the scores you just saw, and respectful behavior ofr each of the major groups. The results, shown on the overhead, indicated that there is a correlation between feelings of support and respectful behavior only for women nonathletes. It will become clearer why this result may have occured when individual items are examined and I would like to discuss it at that time. For now, the data indicated that for most groups, disrespectful behavior is not a result of or related to feelings of mistrust of the sport official. This finding contradicts the theory that disrespect in sport is due to general disregard for authority. The sport official is seen as an authority figure, but this is not related to what degree of disrespect is shown.

The analysis of subgroup responses to the respectful behavior items helps further clarify this finding. The median scores for several subgroups were computed and are shown on the overhead. Remember a higher score is more respectful, with a maximum of 98 possible. Chi squares were computed to compare these medians for significant differences. It was found that women athletes scored significantly higher than men athletes ($chi^2 = 9.903$, $p < .01$) and women monathletes scored higher than men nonathletes ($chi^2 = 6.918$, $p. < .01$). Median respectful behavior scores according to sport groups were also computed. Again a chi^2 was performed. Although gymnasts tended to score higher, the chi square comparing sport groups was nonsignificant, meaning that apparent differences could be due to chance and do not indicate differences ($ch^2 = 6.747$, $p. = .08$). However, further item analysis showed significant differences on six individual items. (The items marked resulted in significant chi squares. Numbers 3, 4, 6, and 11, 12, 13) The differences were specific to groups and to situations. Basketball payers were accepting of trying to influence an official by yelling. Swimmers approved of arguing, standing and glaring, and jumping up and down in reaction to a judgment. Yelling, standing and glaring

and trying to influence an official were most accepted by the baseball-softball players. Yet, these same players were less willing to "blame" the official for the loss of a contest than gymnasts or swimmers.

When all the findings are taken into account, it seems that disrespectful behavior displayed in sport results from specific sport traditions for acceptance of behavior rather than a reflection of a mistrust of authority. It appears that one sport is not necessarily "better" than another in respectful behavior since median scores were not significantly different, but that patterns for conduct are different for different groups. Baseball players will yell, which is tradition. Gymnasts must maintain more decorum. Basketball players will try to influence a call in their favor. This has been tolerated and overlooked by referees. Gymnasts and swimmers, however, are more likely to blame the officials for a loss. Each sport has its own accepted norms.

This item analysis further helps explain why women nonathletes previously showed a positive correlation between feelings of support and respectful behavior. This one group is probably the least familiar with the rules, norms, and subtle traditions of sport. Although today women are more involved in sport, most do not yet have the extensive experience of men. Even for men nonathletes, sport is an important part of their socialization, if only as a spectator. Therefore, the women nonathletes do not know what is considered "OK in sport" and see these questionable behaviors as being disrespectful, whereas, the other groups think of it as simply "keeping the game honest", or "making the breaks". In other words, the disrespect in sport seems to be illustrating the traditions and norms of that sport which have been accepted as part of the contest and allowed to persist. It is my belief that if we wish to remove these disrespectful actions from sport, we simply have to apply negative sanctions and not tolerate such behavior. In so doing, new traditions, or standards for conduct would be established.

[1]Surface, Bill. Referee: Roughest Role in Sports. Readers Digest, Dec., 1976, 109, p. 169.

[2]Loy, John W., McPherson, Barry, & Kenyon, Gerald. Sport and Social Systems. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1978.

[3]Easton, David. A Systems Analysis of Political Life. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965.

PRESIDENT

good _:_:_:_:_:_:_ bad

dishonest _:_:_:_:_:_:_ honest

fair _:_:_:_:_:_:_ unfair

cruel _:_:_:_:_:_:_ kind

nice _:_:_:_:_:_:_ awful

REFEREE-UMPIRE

good _:_:_:_:_:_:_ bad

dishonest _:_:_:_:_:_:_ honest

fair _:_:_:_:_:_:_ unfair

cruel _:_:_:_:_:_:_ kind

nice _:_:_:_:_:_:_ awful

DURING A BASKETBALL GAME

1. A player intentionally bumps into the referee during the play following an unfavorable call.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. A player grabs the referee by the shirt as they are leaving the court after a close game.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. After a player is called for a foul he/she argues with the referee.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. A player yells "charging" to influence the referee to call a foul on the opponent.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. Following a close game, a player on the losing team thanks the officials.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. A player yells to the referee "get some glasses" after a close play under the basket.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. A player cusses under his/her breath after a questionable call.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. A player makes an insulting comment about the referee to her/his teammates.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. A player walks up to the referee after a game and says, "you did a lousy job."	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. After being called for a foul, a player admits to his/her teammates "that was a good call."	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. A player criticizes or blames the officials for the loss of the game.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. After having a foul called on him/her, a player stands and glares at the referee.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. A player jumps up and down in reaction to a questionable call.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. After losing a game, a player throws rocks at the referee's car.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Mean Support for Authority Scores According to Classification by Sex and Athletic Status

Group	President	Police Officer	Referee-Umpire
Women athletes	4.98	4.99	5.09
Men athletes	4.92	4.85	5.09
Women nonathletes	4.87	5.17	5.01
Men nonathletes	4.96	4.83	5.16

Rank Order Correlations Between Support for "Referee-Umpire" and Respectful Behavior

Group	Rho(ρ)	P
Women athletes	.08	NS
Men athletes	.289	NS
Women nonathletes	.563	.01
Men nonathletes	.182	NS

Median Scores for Respectful Behavior of Groups Classified by Sex and Athletic Status

Group	Median
Women athletes	83.57
Men athletes	74.67
Women nonathletes	80.50
Men nonathletes	74.83

Median Respectful Behavior Scores for Sport Groups

Group	Median
Baseball-Softball	77.00
Basketball	77.17
Gymnastics	81.75
Swimming	72.50

ITEM ANALYSIS OF STATEMENTS FOR RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR

Item	Chi square	P
1. A player intentionally bumps or splashes an official during the contest.	26.858	.085
2. A player grabs the official by the shirt after the contest.	23.315	.182
* 3. A player argues with the official about a call.	43.832	.001
* 4. A player yells something to influence the official to penalize the opponent.	39.335	.003
5. A player thanks the official after a contest.	27.430	.078
* 6. A player yells "get some glasses."	39.166	.003
7. A player cusses under his/her breath.	21.766	.245

8. A player makes an insulting comment about the official to a teammate.	19.403	.369
9. A player tells the official "you did a lousy job" after the contest.	23.136	.188
10. A player admits that the official made a good call.	23.404	.178
*11. A player criticizes or blames the official for the loss of a contest.	35.302	.010
*12. A player stands and glares at the official after a judgement call.	36.990	.006
*13. A player jumps up and down in reaction to a questionable call.	33.177	.017
14. After losing a contest, a player throws rocks at the official's car.	15.854	.602